

## CASSIE'S TESTIMONY FOR THE HENRY FORD

For decades, the Detroit Riverfront was a harsh, industrial landscape with crumbling buildings, weeded lots and abandoned vehicles. Leaders from throughout the community had long wanted a gathering place for all and a safe space for families to bring their children along the waterfront.

Plans for a revitalized riverfront began to gain traction in the late 90s. By 2003, the Detroit RiverFront Conservancy was launched by civic, community and public leaders who took the lead in putting together a plan to develop public space on Detroit's historic and international riverfront.

The Conservancy's ultimate vision is to develop five-and-a-half miles of riverfront from the Ambassador Bridge to just east of the MacArthur Bridge at Belle Isle with greenways along the way connecting communities to the Riverwalk.

Since its inception the Conservancy has set the standard on how public space is maintained and operated. As the permanent stewards of the riverfront, the Conservancy is responsible for construction, operation, maintenance, security and programming, all funding comes from the community it serves through individuals, corporations, foundations, and support from various state run organizations.

This once neglected, under-used riverfront has been transformed into a world-class gathering space that draws three million visitors each year. It is a four-season destination that features parks, plazas, pavilions, greenways and trails. Include in the folders that I've handed out are before and after photos of the work the Conservancy has accomplished over the last 10 years that further shows how important this transformation was to the city of Detroit. It also shares more information on how the Conservancy's work serves as an anchor for economic revitalization.

Along the East, more than three miles of RiverWalk connects visitors with a series of parks and amenities such as water features, cafes, picnic areas, playgrounds, butterfly gardens, a bike shop and a carousel. Also along the East is the two-mile-long Dequindre Cut, a former railway that has been transformed into a pedestrian greenway featuring colorful murals and links the riverfront for several neighborhoods.

For many visitors to the Detroit Riverfront, its natural beauty and many amenities are the draw. For thousands more, it's the programs and special events the Detroit Riverfront Conservancy offers that make it a popular place to visit. Programs include yoga and Tai Chi classes, rain barrel classes and a literacy program for children. Special events include Touch-A-Truck, Fishing Fest, Riverfront Relaxin,' Harvestfest and the unofficial kick off to summer for 165,000 visitors each year, River Days.

This past year, our focus has shifted to the West where a 22-acre park stretches out along the river. It is a green oasis with sweeping views of the Detroit and Windsor skylines and it is popular with fisherman and visitors who love its wide expanses. Thanks to the Ralph C. Wilson Foundation the

Conservancy is hosting an international design competition to reimagine the park and transform it into one of the most dynamic public spaces in the world. On February 8<sup>th</sup> these plans will be presented to the public by the competing firms at 1001 Woodward where Detroiters will witness the future and the power of public space. An exhibit of the models for the potential park will be on display for two weeks following the event allowing everyone to provide feedback.

In addition to the future park on the west, this year development will start on Atwater Beach transforming the former home of a cement factory into a giant family friendly playground and over at the Uniroyal site we open a RiverWalk connection to the MacArthur Bridge at Belle Isle—a connection that is 10 years in the making.

We at the Conservancy are dedicated to providing a world class gathering space for all where we proudly proclaim: bring everybody. Thank you.